



# News Release

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Contacts: [Kate Lynch](#), Communications Office

360-236-4072

## **Safety first: on, in, and by the water — it's easy, with a little common sense** *May begins boating season; make sure it's not drowning season*

**OLYMPIA** — Sunny days ahead beckon us to cool off on, in, and by one of the many water bodies in Washington. Although the air is warmer, the water is still cold, deep, and potentially deadly.

“We love to be on the water here in Washington,” said State Health Officer Dr. Maxine Hayes. “But we may forget that, unless you’re practicing kayak moves at the local indoor pool, water can be so cold that you might not survive a quick dip without a life jacket. More people drown in Washington in May and July than other months.”

May is the official start of boating season in much of the state, and it’s also when some of the coldest water from snowmelt enters streams and rivers. Cold water can disable a person 15 times faster than cold air. Combined with the cold, strong and fast currents make many rivers and streams treacherous. A calm ocean or bay can be deceiving with current and tidal changes that can quickly sweep people out to sea.

Life jackets are recommended for everyone and are required for children on the water. In Washington, all children younger than 13 years old on boats shorter than 19 feet must wear life jackets that are Coast Guard approved. Make sure they are correctly fitted for the child’s size.

**On the water:** Check water flow condition and hazard warnings before getting in a boat, kayak, or raft. The [U.S. Geological Survey](http://waterdata.usgs.gov/wa/nwis/rt) (waterdata.usgs.gov/wa/nwis/rt) updates conditions statewide regularly, or call 253-428-3600 ext. 2635. Water conditions and hazards for [King County](http://kingcounty.gov/recreation/boating/rivers.aspx) (kingcounty.gov/recreation/boating/rivers.aspx) rivers and streams are also updated regularly. Scout the river, lake, or bay before you put in. **In the water:** Learn to swim. Always wear a life jacket in the water. Watch for and steer clear of branches, logjams, small dams, and falls that can pin you underwater.

— More —

**By the water:** Ocean currents can be unseen but powerful. Rip currents, sneaker waves, undertow, and tidal changes can sweep you off your feet and out to sea. Check weather conditions and tide tables before venturing onto the beach. If you're caught in a rip current, swim parallel to shore until you're out of the current, and then swim to shore. Children can slip into the water quickly and quietly – be sure to closely supervise all children around water.

More water safety resources are available on our [water safety website](#).

The [Department of Health website](#) ([www.doh.wa.gov](http://www.doh.wa.gov)) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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